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The Truth about Drug Companies: How They Deceive Us and What to Do about It

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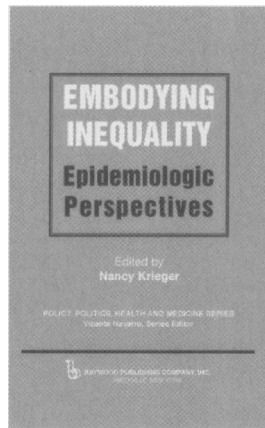
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Embodying Inequality: Epidemiological Perspectives

Edited by Nancy Krieger;
Amityville, NY: Baywood
Publishing Co. Inc., 2005

Embodying Inequality: Epidemiological Perspectives has as its focus social inequalities in health. This is an edited book with a collection of chapters of social epidemiology theory and studies. Social epidemiology is distinguished by its insistence on explicitly investigating social determinants of population distributions of health, disease and well-being, rather than treating such determinants as mere background to biomedical phenomena. The book is structured into two primary sections, with the first group of chapters focusing on history, theory and methods, and the second section being a selection of empirical studies on social epidemiology. The studies concern a variety of issues, including racial disparities in health, homelessness and health, gender and health, employment and sexual orientation. Further, the studies investigate these issues in a variety of countries, including the United States, Mexico, France, Great Britain and Finland.

Nancy Krieger, the editor of *Embodying Inequality: Epidemiological Perspectives*, is an expert in social epidemiology and has written concise and informative introductions to subsections of the book as a way to bring an understanding of the linking of the collected chapters. It is important to note that the chapters in the book were not written for this book but are reprinted articles previously published in the *International Journal of Health Services*. This strategy of selecting previous articles from only one journal is one that may be ultimately unsatisfying for the reader. It was for me.



Although the historical section of the book was informative and useful in terms of presenting “classic” articles, the fact that the chapters in the book have not been updated really puts the reader at a loss wondering what new information might have appeared in the literature since the article was published. Most were published in the mid-1990s but some are as old as the early 1980s. Additionally, by selecting from only one journal, the book has a theme but may be too limiting in its choice of studies to include. This question of being up to date is particularly salient when reading the empirical examples. For example, in the chapter entitled, “Integrating Nonemployment into Research on Health Inequalities,” which was originally published in 1996, uses data from 1991 and 1992. Are there studies that modify the previously reported findings when we consider this issue in 2005?

In summary, this book is useful for individuals who want to learn more about some of the theoretical underpinnings of social epidemiology but may be unsatisfying for individuals who want a contemporary review of the literature.

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The Truth about Drug Companies: How They Deceive Us and What to Do about It

Marcia Angell, MD; Random
House, 2004

Drug companies are an integral part of medicine. We deal with their marketing, they try to set our priorities, and oftentimes our success or failure is based on the quality of the products they provide to us. The closeness of the medical and pharmaceutical industry makes the issues covered in this book familiar but not part of our world in medicine.

Marcia Angell, an editor at the *New England Journal of Medicine* for over 20 years and a former editor-in-chief of that publication, has been exposed to and interacted with the pharmaceutical companies on many levels, and has some great stories to tell with a fair amount of information that comes from being where the decisions are being made.

Unfortunately, her political philosophy pervades much of the book and taints some of her criticism of how things are done. It is also curious that as a former editor she chose not to look at the one area of pharmaceutical advertising she would be most familiar with—the ads that appear in journals. Angell dismisses that activity as being inconsequential since it is so small a percentage of how these companies spend money.

It is fun to read, and exposes many of the marketing techniques used by the drug companies. It also gets you angry—and gives an insider perspective on many of the techniques used to market medicine today.

Angell asserts throughout the book that the rampant success of the drug companies is not because of better product but of more advantageous laws. There has also been a paradigm shift. “Once upon a time, drug companies promoted

drugs to treat diseases, Now it is often the opposite. They promote diseases to fit their drugs.”

The other point Angell makes over and over again is that the drug companies care more about profit and business than patients. Her clear opinion is that these companies should serve the public good and not stockholders. And that the public is being taken advantage of by funding research that can then be used and developed by others for a profit.

She ends the book with clear proposals to fix the system that she feels is so badly broken. Limit the number of medicines that can be made in the same class of drug, prohibit the drug companies from being involved in medical education and have the government regulate the prices of drugs.

Physicians should read this book to gain an appreciation of the size and power of the pharmaceutical industry. We first need to understand the problem before we can decide how we want to fix it.

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